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AUTHOR Hargreaves, Andy
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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the realities of school restructuring in Canada are experienced and perceived differently among different teachers, by the same teachers at different times, and between teachers on the one hand and students on the other. Realities of restructuring are often divergent and dissonant in nature. No one group has an inherently privileged or inherently superior interpretation of these realities. One cannot properly speak of the teacher's voice, only of teacher voices, and of voices that may vary for individual teachers, depending on time and place. Theoretically, the paper deconstructs the notion of the teacher's voice as something that has been made into a romantic singularity, favorably opposing it to and imposing it upon all other voices. It points to the presence of many different teacher voices and to the existence and importance of other voices as well as those of teachers. Practically, the paper identifies a need to bring together the different voices surrounding schooling: those of teachers, students, and parents alike. (Contains 55 references.)
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Dissonant Voices:

Teachers and the Multiple Realities of Restructuring

Andy Hargreaves
Department of Educational Administration
The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

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Abstract

Dissonant Voices:
Teachers and the Multiple Realities of Restructuring

This paper is about teachers' voices and the realities of school restructuring. It argues and exemplifies the fact that not only are the realities of restructuring different from the rhetoric, but that these realities also vary. They are experienced and perceived differently among different teachers, by the same teachers at different times, and between teachers on the one hand and students on the other. There are many realities of restructuring; not just one. These realities are often divergent, and dissonant in nature. No one group has an inherently privileged or inherently superior interpretation of these realities. While the voices of teachers, are often valid, therefore, their value is not special or superior to any other voices. One cannot properly speak of the teacher's voice, only of teacher voices, and of voices that may vary for individual teachers, depending on time and place.

Theoretically, the paper deconstructs the notion of the teacher's voice as something that has been made into a romantic singularity, favourably opposing it to and imposing it upon all other voices. It points to the presence of many different teacher voices, and to the existence and importance of other voices as well as those of teachers. Practically, the paper identifies a need to bring together the different voices surrounding schooling: those of teachers, students and parents alike.

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature advocating school restructuring, outlining plans for restructuring, and describing administrative models or case summaries of restructuring (e.g. Murphy, 1991; Elmore, 1989; Lieberman, Darling-Hammond and Zuckerman, 1991). There is much less literature on the complex and often conflicting realities of restructuring as experienced by teachers, students and parents (Wehlage, Smith and Lipman, 1992). Understanding restructuring depends on understanding these multi-layered realities. Making restructuring more inclusive and productive depends on finding ways to bring together the varied voices of its participants, in shared dialogue and critical community.

Among the many participants in school restructuring, teachers are increasingly regarded as absolutely key to the success of restructuring efforts (Sarason, 1990; Lieberman, Darling-Hammond & Zuckerman, 1991) and, indeed, of educational change more generally, (e.g., Fullan, 1991; Richardson, 1991; Little, 1993). If teachers do not like a change, do not understand it, do not agree with it, or think it is impractical, then the change will likely be implemented incompetently, insincerely, or not at all (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991). This brings to the fore the importance of understanding and acknowledging teachers' knowledge, teachers' experiences and teachers' voices in relation to processes of restructuring and of educational change more widely.

Recent years have seen a rapidly expanding field of research and writing on teachers' experience (Hargreaves, 1984; Buchmann and Schwille, 1983), teachers' knowledge (Elbaz, 1983; Clandinin, 1986; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Gudmundsdöttir, 1991; Grumet, 1987), teachers' biographies (Goodson, 1981; Woods, 1987; Huberman, 1993), teacher reflection (Grimmett and Erickson, 1988; Louden, 1991; Liston and Zeichner, 1991) and teachers' voices (Elbaz, 1991; Britzman, 1991; Carter, 1993; Goodson, 1992). Each of these strands of inquiry captures part of the subjective meanings that teachers attach to their work, but the concern with *voice* has special relevance for the place teachers' occupy in school restructuring and reform; be this as silent objects, muddling mediators or articulate authors of the change process.

In this paper, I want to analyze some of the detailed classroom and work realities of school restructuring for teachers as well as for their students. I shall do so by drawing on a program of work in which I have been involved with a number of colleagues over the past five years.[1] This has analyzed the policies and practices of school restructuring for Grades 7-9 that have been promoted in and in some cases legislated by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, Canada.[2] I will begin with a critical review of some of the literature on teachers' voices, and of how effectively it speaks to the complex and contexted realities of teachers' working lives. I shall then refer to some of the qualitative data in our research program to draw three portrayals of teachers' work in the context of school restructuring. These portrayals are presented and interpreted to help deepen our understanding of teachers' experiences of restructuring, and to put the voices and experiences of teachers in perspective compared to those of students who are also experiencing school restructuring. I will conclude with some recommendations as to how we might reconstruct and re-present teachers' voices in the light of what we learn from the portrayals, and as to how teachers' and other voices might be included and engaged more effectively in processes of change and restructuring.

In general, I shall advocate that we *understand, acknowledge* and *include* teachers' voices and experiences in school restructuring, without necessarily feeling impelled and obliged to *endorse* them. Second, in revealing substantial differences between teachers' voices and experiences, and the voices and experiences of the students they teach, I shall point to the necessity of seeing the voices and experiences of teachers as unavoidably partial ones that should be accorded no presumed privilege over the voices and experiences of others in the schooling process. Third, I shall suggest that teachers' voices and experiences should be understood not in terms of romantic and gratuitous celebrations of the teachers' craft or of missionary commitments to building and justifying teachers' professionalism, but in terms of the real contexts of how teachers' voices and experiences are actually developed and used. It is to a *critical* and *contexted* understanding of teachers' voices, that this paper is addressed.

Revisiting Voice

In recent years, as Elbaz (1990:10) notes, "the notion of voice has been central to the development of research on teachers' knowledge and thinking". This notion of voice, Elbaz goes on to argue, "is used against the background of a previous silence". Thus, Butt and his colleagues (1992:57) write that

> The notion of the teacher's voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings, that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes. In a political sense, the notion of the teacher's voice addresses the right to speak and be represented. It can represent both the unique individual and the collective voice; one that is characteristic of teachers as compared to other groups.

Teachers' voices have frequently been silenced by policy and suppressed or distorted within educational research. As Carter (1993:8) has expressed it:

> At one level, the issue of voice centers on the extent to which the languages of research on teaching, with their emphasis on general propositions allow for the authentic expression of teachers' experiences and concerns. At a second level, the issue is one of discourse and power, that is, the extent to which the languages of researchers not only deny teachers the right to speak for and about teaching but also form part of a network of power that functions for the remote control of teaching practice by policymakers and administrators.

Such advocacy for the value of teacher voices is in many ways deeply admirable. Policy makers repeatedly ignore or exclude the voices of teachers in the reform process and fail to make reform meaningful to them (Fullan, 1991; Astuto, et al. 1993). Willard Waller (1932:457) recognized this long ago when he argued that

> The commonsense understanding which teachers have of their problems bites deeper than do the maunderings of most theorists. Teachers will do well to insist that any program of

> educational reform shall start with them, that it shall be based on, and shall include, their common-sense insight.

Teachers who otherwise might be inclined to change in and of themselves ironically become deeply resistant to change when it is imposed insensitively and seemingly incoherently from above (Richardson, 1991; Huberman, 1993). Likewise, for too many years, the bulk of educational research on teaching and learning simply passed teachers by. It portrayed teachers' classrooms simplistically and blamed teachers for their students' failures too easily. Studies of teaching effectiveness and classroom interaction alike seemed to "blame the teacher" for the inadequacies and injustices that were experienced under their tutelage. It is for these reasons that Goodson (1992:112) has called for "reconceptualizing research so as to assure that 'the teacher's voice' is heard, both loudly and articulately". Recognizing and respecting teachers' voices and the worth of the knowledge and experience they articulate, gives teachers rightful redress against the background of this previous and prolonged silence. However, I want to suggest, the pendulum of understanding teachers, their voices and concerns, may now be swinging too far the other way.

Interestingly, the teacher's voice is frequently represented as *the* teacher's voice. This discursive formulation is not accidental. To speak of *the* teacher's voice is to speak of a singular voice, that is also a representative voice, a voice that supposedly embodies qualities that are generic to all teachers and teaching. This construction of the teacher's voice is not an empirical and descriptive one, but ultimately a morally laden and prescriptive one. Yet description and prescription are covertly collapsed into one another so that "ought" becomes "is". In this way, what researchers *want* teachers to be, their ideal teacher's voice is passed off as a statement of how teachers actually *are*.

Thus, Elbaz (1991:15) claims that "teachers *necessarily* speak from a moral standpoint; they are always concerned with the good of pupils." (my emphasis). It is hard to reconcile this claim with evidence from other traditions that many teachers in mid-to-late-career, for instance, who have become "disenchanted" or "defensive focusers", no longer hold the good of

their students as a particularly high priority (Huberman, 1993; Sikes, Measor and Woods, 1985; Riseborough, 1981). Similarly, research on secondary school teachers indicates that they are often interested in their subject matter and its successful transmission as much as and sometimes more than they are interested in any good of their students (Siskin, 1994; Book and Freeman, 1986; Noddings, 1992; Goodson, 1988; Ball, 1987; Hargreaves and Earl, 1990).

Advocates for the teacher's voice and its moral qualities do often ground their claims in empirical studies of particular teachers, but these teachers are teachers of a particular sort. They are usually humanistic, rather than conservative or politically radical; and involved in class teaching of younger students more than subject specialist teaching at the secondary level (e.g. Louden, 1991; Elbaz, 1983; Clandinin, 1986). Such teachers are in subjects whose philosophical orientation and broad value position are generally in tune with those of the people who study them. These teachers' voices are not randomly representative voices. They are selectively appropriated ones.

Ironically, the move by some researchers towards working more collaboratively with teachers in ways that include their voices and experiences, has helped consolidate this selective appropriation of teachers' voices. Connelly and Clandinin(1990:12), for instance, have urged that teachers and researchers need to tell and share their stories together, creating collaborative stories between them. This search for collaboration understandably also carries with it a search for the sorts of people and relationships who might make that collaboration both possible and pleasurable. Louden (1991:3), for instance, in his collaborative study with one teacher describes how, when establishing his research, he had "found a school with the sort of friendly and informal environment I had always admired" (It was an alternative school). He explained to the teacher with whom he ultimately developed the study, that he was looking for "a teacher who shared my interest in the balance between students' independence and teachers' control, who was struggling to make some changes in her teaching, and who was teaching subjects I did not know how to teach". Similarly, Clandinin's (1986) study of two teachers' personal practical knowledge was of a friend who taught Early Childhood Education and who had worked with the author on two major projects; and of a second teacher who volunteered as

part of a larger case study, taught Grade 1 and 2 and was actively involved in inservice education and general professional development. Elbaz's (1983) one-teacher study reveals a similar kind of selection.

Oddly, therefore, the impetus towards collaborative research, and the necessity of building constructive and comforting relationships that make such research possible, has inclined many researchers of teachers' voice and teachers' knowledge not to understand and make intelligible the concerns or preoccupations of teachers very different from themselves, — not to confront the alien 'other', as it were — but in many ways, to reveal through studies of kindred spirits, reflected and refracted images of themselves. These selected few then become a more generalized 'other' conceptually engraved in the researcher's own image. Research on teachers' voice and teachers' knowledge is, accordingly, replete with studies of teachers who are caring, committed and child-centred, but not of teachers who are cynical, elitist, sexist or racist! What would we say about these latter teachers' voices and the knowledge they articulate? What would be the general worth of teachers' knowledge and teachers' voice, then?

In short, the discourse of the teacher's voice has tended to construct it in a particularly "positive" way against a background of silence in which it had been previously trapped by policy and research. This discourse works by selectively appropriating particular empirical voices of predominantly humanistic, child-centred teachers, then condensing them into a singular voice, *the* teacher's voice, which becomes representative of *all* teachers. This generic voice is given a particular and positive moral loading in the sense, for instance, that all teachers are concerned with their students' good. The distinctiveness of the teacher's voice and the special contribution it can make to policy and research is thereby asserted. Yet these "positive" moral characteristics are not grounded in the knowledge or voices of all teachers or even of "ordinary" teachers, but of selectively appropriated teachers whose values and commitments are in broad harmony or at least not in absolute discord with those who study them. Instead of searching for and listening appreciatively to voices that differ, voices that jar, voices that might even offend, we are perhaps too ready to hear only those voices that broadly echo our own.

It is time to deconstruct this moral singularity of the teacher's voice. The teacher's voice that was once empirically silent is now, in research terms, in danger of becoming morally strident. Though victims of silence in the worlds of policy and research, teachers' voices often themselves create and sustain silence among other groups in the worlds within which teachers themselves work. Decades of research in classroom interaction and classroom discourse have shown how teachers monopolize most classroom talk (Flanders, 1970), how they tend to ask questions to which they already know the answer (Hammersley, 1977) and how teacher-dominated didactic pedagogies still prevail (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984). More recent research indicates how subtly but systematically, the curricula and pedagogies of public education disregard, deny and thereby silence the voices of students who eventually drop out (Stevenson and Ellsworth, 1993), of students who are African-American (Foster, 1993), of students who are Native American (Tierney, 1993) and of many other students as well (Weis and Fine, 1993). Teachers' experiences of classroom life, we will see, are very different from those of their students. They see the classroom from another place than their students, from a place of power, a position of authority, and a life of relative comfort and privilege. This gives classroom life an unavoidably different reality for them than for their students. Teachers' views of classroom life are, in this respect, particular and selective ones: not right or wrong, but certainly partial and incomplete.

Though silenced in research and in policy, teachers' voices often prevail inordinately within their own institutions, to the exclusion of students' and parents' ones. Teachers' and students' experiences, we will see are clearly very different, and sometimes diametrically opposed, even within the same classroom. While many schools are trying to build cultures of collegiality among teachers in their staffrooms (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Little, 1993), they are, at the same time, often retaining and perpetuating autistic cultures of miscommunication and misunderstanding in their classrooms and communities. If these differences of experience, perception and understanding are to be reconciled, students' and parents' voices need to be brought more closely together with those of their teachers This means continuing to respect teacher's voices but acknowledging the validity of other voices alongside them. It means not giving all teachers' voices "unwarranted

authenticity" (Carter, 1993, p. 8). Understanding teachers' voices should be a priority. Romanticizing the teacher's voice should not.

I now want to elaborate on and make concrete this critique of the teacher's voice and its relationship to educational change by developing three portrayals of teaching and teachers' work drawn from a program of research on school restructuring in which I have been involved.

1. Contexts of Difference

My first portrayal is taken from a case study of an innovative 'lighthouse' school, specially established as a restructured, school with a detracked Grade 9 program, where, as one of over 60 Ministry funded pilot projects for restructuring, its newly appointed staff would seek to establish innovative practices in teaching, curriculum, assessment and counselling. This case, along with the other five pilot projects we studied in detail, involved observations and interviews with around ten teachers and approximately 12 students in the targetted Grade 9 program. Many of the interview discussions were based upon the day's observations, giving them an immediate and concrete context. The portrayal presented here is based on my own observations of a day in the school life of one Grade 9 student in this lighthouse school.

Larry is a "regular" Grade 9 student; neither "gifted" nor learning disabled. He is ethnically oriental. Left-handed, he writes rather slowly. Asked how his teachers would describe him, his response is "Quiet, but not as quiet as I am today, because you're with me!"

Larry's day begins with social studies — a lesson on leadership. It is a detracked class of Grade 9 students: detracked for the first time, in a school specifically established for this purpose. Looked at from the teacher's point of view, this is an active lesson, with different approaches to learning, requiring considerable planning and continuous monitoring. The broad sequence of the lesson is one of a brief (ten minutes or so) set of opening remarks by the teacher, designed to settle the class down and introduce the topic. There is then a short period of question-and-answer work with the whole class about leadership, followed by students individually brainstorming their own

personal lists of leaders and sharing them with their partners. Students, who are seated in pairs, are then invited three or four at a time to go up to the blackboard and list their own names of leaders. Other students then replace the existing ones and add further names until approximately fifty names in total have been itemized. The list is a diverse one, stretching from political figures such as Ghandi, Hitler, Pierre Trudeau, Boris Yeltzin, Margaret Thatcher and Malcolm X, to sports personalities such as Magic Johnson, and Mohammed Ali, and to names in popular culture including Wayne Campbell (of Wayne's World), Cindy Crawford (a "supermodel") and Al Bundy (of the situation comedy, "Married with Children"). All names are accepted by the teacher.

The teacher circulates, watches the lists being compiled, corrects spelling where appropriate, comments generally on there being many good suggestions, and prods the class to reflect on their initial list of leaders being rather gender specific (i.e. all male). The teacher remarks that some people are "getting *off* topic" and draws the class back to one name, ice hockey player, Wendel Clark, and asks why he is a leader. "Because he's looked up to", is the reply. On a second blackboard, the teacher then writes the heading: *Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Leader* and lists various items underneath; some herself, and some from class suggestions — for example "Goes out of their way to do the job." She corrects suggestions using "his" or "him" and asks for students to reformulate them in "non-gender language". After listing twenty-nine items, the teacher asks the students to list five of their own, then choose one leadership quality, justifying why they have selected it.

The teacher then says, "We have twenty-nine characteristics of a good leader. Can you put these in your notebooks and I'm going to ask you to do something with them." She reaffirms this by writing on the board.

1. Which of the qualities is most important?

2. Which leader would you choose to run Canada and why?

She explains this to the class once more. When someone mutters "Al Bundy", the risible, low-life anti-hero of the sitcom "Married with Children",

she adds, "could you please put a serious tone on it?" Students have to complete their answers to these questions for homework.

The class has run for an hour and ten minutes. Looking at it from the teacher's viewpoint, it seems a particularly active and engaging lesson. Students have done individual writing, had a brief discussion in pairs, engaged with the teacher in whole-class interchanges, and participated in public brainstorming of ideas on the blackboard. Many leaders' names have been generated — drawn from politics, history, sport and popular culture. The teacher accepts all of these initially, even the most dubious ones, and in that sense, respects the learning principles of brainstorming. Yet, when students try to focus on some of the more outrageous suggestions as a basis for discussion or diversion, she gently, though firmly puts them back on task. She offers praise for their creativity and quality of ideas, yet also intervenes constructively to correct their spelling and comment on their gender-biased contributions and sentence constructions. From the teacher's standpoint, this seems to be just the kind of creative, engaged and varied pattern of teaching and learning which Ontario's restructuring initiatives have been trying to bring about in Grade 9 classrooms. How does it look from where Larry is sitting, however; from his perspective in this class as a student?

After listening to the teacher from 8:50 until just after 9:00, Larry brainstorms his own list of leaders from across the world. At 9:08, while the teacher is still circulating around the class which is working in silence, Larry is completing his list and also looking over his neighbour's shoulder. He is then required, as are other students, to explain to his partner why the people he has listed are leaders. He then watches students compile the list of leaders on the board. Many are keen to do so ("I'm next!" "Me too!"). Larry adds one name of his own. The class is generally watching, chatting and commenting on the names. Larry continues to watch.

At approximately 9:20, the class, including Larry, copy down the list of over fifty leaders' names into their books, accompanied by quiet background chatter. At 9:29, the teacher instructs class members to choose five leaders and write down why they are good ones. Larry makes no eye contact with the teacher here as she delivers her instructions, but continues to write. At 9:34,

he is still writing in his slow, left hand. The teacher now selects the name Wendel Clark and discusses with the class why he is a leader. While the teacher then writes the "Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Leader" heading on the board, Larry silently scans his own list. At 9:37, while the teacher is listing leadership characteristics, Larry is still scanning. At 9:40, the teacher walks by and looks briefly at Larry's and his partner's lists. After she passes, Larry turns over the page, looks at the board list, looks at his partner's list from a distance, continues to do so as his teacher begins to rebuke his partner for chatting, then quietly tosses an eraser up and down. He looks back at the board, thumb in mouth, then back at his partner. It is 9:44 and unlike several classmates, he has not yet written anything about leadership qualities.

As the teacher talks with the class about leadership qualities, Larry begins to write in his book. He doesn't volunteer contributions to discussion. He is hunched over his work, looking forward, with a pencil in his hand. At 9:48, while the teacher is still soliciting ideas, he chats quietly to his partner; then looks forward, arms folded, hunched over again. By 9:51, the teacher has generated twenty-nine characteristics of good leaders and asks the class to put them in their notebooks. Larry begins to prepare to write again, looking at the board. At 9:52, he rises and sharpens his pencil, not actually having begun to write yet. After this, he returns and commences copying the list. He continues to write as the teacher issues instructions about selecting the most important leadership characteristic — a task that will provide the foundation for homework. When suggestions are sought for leaders who would be suitable to run Canada and the name "Al Bundy" is called out, Larry laughs with the rest of the class. Then he returns to copying his list. At 9:57, the teacher walks past, but Larry takes no notice. 9:59, and he is still writing. At 10:02, he is correcting something he has written with an eraser. Behind him, a student mutters that the "perfect leader would be me", and Larry smiles. At 10:04, Larry is still looking at the board and chatting to his partner intermittently. As the teacher issues homework instructions, Larry continues to talk to his partner. At 10:05, the class ends.

This is one classroom, one lesson, but not one common experience. The teacher's experience of this social studies lesson, and Larry's experience of it, seem very different. For the teacher, this is not a conventional, didactic

lesson of the sort commonly vilified in secondary school classrooms. It is a lesson of busy, bustling activity; of efforts to secure student participation individually, in pairs, in brainstorming groups and in whole-class discussion. The teacher repeatedly monitors, intervenes, corrects, develops ideas, and keeps students on task while trying to retain their involvement. Active learning does not involve abdicating teaching! The teacher works hard at what she does.

Larry's involvement in the lesson is very different, though. Apart from a brief interaction of approximately three minutes duration, with his partner, about leadership characteristics, most of the lesson for him involves listening to the teacher, glancing back and forth between the board and his notes, but overwhelmingly, for long periods, and even while the teacher is talking and giving out instructions, copying a total of seventy-nine items off the blackboard into his exercise book.

From the teacher's vantage point, the social studies lesson is innovative and active. From the standpoint of Larry, the student, it is mainly routine and passive, comprising forms of listening and copying down that may present little or no serious alternative to traditional textbook-based teaching. Our classroom observation data in the wider study contain many other instances of this sort, where teachers seem to be working hard to break the traditional paradigms of secondary school teaching, yet where, despite all the effort and ingenuity, meaningful student engagement of a different and better kind appears to remain elusive (Hargreaves et al., 1993).

The experiences of Larry and his teacher in this class seem different and even dissonant in nature. The realities of restructuring are not the same for each of them. This is not just a universal problem of people's subjective meanings always being necessarily different from one another. The problem is also firmly grounded in the structures and processes of classroom life. Teachers, for instance, are usually reluctant to explain innovation to students, still less to involve them actively in its development (Rudduck, 1990). Similarly, we found in our wider study of the pilot projects in restructuring, that although many teachers tried to change their assessment practices, they still maintained a basic structure where students remained targets of rather

than partners in that assessment (Hargreaves et al., 1993). Even innovative classrooms, it seems remain poor places for the development of shared meaning between teachers and their students. Power differentials in most classrooms remain pervasive, as do the differences in experience and perception that accompany them.

Theoretically, this should lead us to question the superiority of teachers' voices and experiences, and place them in proper perspective. Practically, it should lead us to ask how lessons that are so active and demanding for the teacher, can remain so passive and routine for the student. How can these very different realities of restructuring be reconciled and reconstructed? Even in innovation inclined settings such as this, how can the worlds and the voices of the teacher and the student be brought together more effectively?

2. Changes of Context

If a more critical stance needs to be taken towards teachers' voices, experiences, and knowledge, this does not mean that we should dismiss these voices or derogate them; that we should swing back with the pendulum to a language and culture of blame. What I am calling for here is a commitment to understanding *real* voices not *ideal* ones; listening to *ordinary* teachers, whatever discomfort they may cause for our own perspectives, rather than *selectively appropriated* ones whose views cohere broadly with our own; and understanding teachers' voices and experiences not just in terms of romantic hopes or moral ideals, but also in terms of the practical contexts in which they are used and which give them meaning. The importance of developing such a contextualized rather than decontextualized understanding of teachers' voices and experiences is illustrated in this second portrayal, where we revisit Larry's classes once more.

After science, Larry's Period 3 is French (Grade 9, detracked). His class begins at 12:28. His teacher, Miss Roscow, whom I have observed before, tells me it will be "another Socratic lesson". The class is organized in three rows. Larry sits next to the back with his exercise book in front of him. Miss Roscow writes the homework (Devoirs, p. 59) on the blackboard. There is quite a lot of chatting while she does this.

The students have photocopied worksheets in front of them. Miss Roscow goes through their homework with them (on these sheets). It involves identifying and positioning objects in sentences. She explains the exercises "en Français". Larry sits quietly, listens, looks at his paper then gets out of his seat to confer with two girls about the questions. While the class continues to work on the exercises, Miss Roscow is arranging papers on her desk and chatting to students near the front. Two boys are drumming loudly on their desks. Two others, in a semi-flirtatious manner, engage her in conversation about her weekend. Larry, meanwhile, is looking at his neighbour's work, and chatting quietly.

At 12:35, the class is becoming very noisy and engaged in many conversations, while the teacher interacts in French with a smaller group. At 12:37, Miss Roscow addresses the whole class ("Mesdames et Messieurs"), then in French she instructs them to turn to Unit 3 and signals for their attention with "Et puis!" Larry continues to chat with his partner. Miss Roscow now directs around half the class to continue with written exercises, while identifying and segregating the remainder of the students who have not completed homework and are therefore required to do it in class. Larry is not in the homework group. He seems uncertain as to what he is to do. He looks to the rear to check with other students.

By 12:43, the class has reorganized into two broad groups (although they are working individually within these groups). The homework group chats while the teacher clarifies the task for the rest of the group — there appears to be one task, undifferentiated by ability or level of difficulty. Miss Roscow is now questioning them about their answers in their worksheets concerned with placing objects in sentences. This group is quiet, but the homework group continues to chat and indeed is becoming a little boisterous. In dialogue with the teacher, Larry is selected to answer a couple of questions in French. Students are then asked to discuss, compare and correct their answers with partners, then list new ones on the blackboard. Larry and other students begin this at 12:50.

After discussing one question, Larry begins talking with his partner about hockey. He then goes to the board to write down further items but

seems unclear about how to do this and is indeed blocked by a large group of other students already at the board, making quite a commotion. Larry waits at the back, smiling and chewing, then returns to his desk, fainting a "high five" to a fellow student on the way. Miss Roscow, meanwhile, is busy with the homework group.

Over the next few minutes, Larry sits quietly, watches other students, chats to and laughs with a student in front, flicks paper with his partner and simulates table soccer on his desk, making goalposts with his fingers, through which his friend flicks the paper. Although the homework group is chatting quietly with the teacher, the rest of the class is now talking quite noisily. Larry continues to chat, flick paper, and now uses a pencil, twirling it as a baton in competition with his partner. There is more banter and interaction, then at 1:02, Miss Roscow calls for the whole class' attention and reinforces this by putting her finger on her lips, smiling, and waiting for silence. What follows is a question-and-answer session with the whole class to review and extend vocabulary, based on sentences or questions in the textbook (e.g. examples are discussed of "un sport dangereux"). At 1:04, after a day of mainly sitting in classes and doing a lot of reading, writing, copying and listening (with the exception of practical work in science), Larry now has his finger in his textbook and is jiggling the paper up and down. While class discussion continues, he exchanges words with the students in front intermittently but over quite a period of time — in between which he catches bits of the question and answer discussion, and also continues flicking his book.

At 1:10, the teacher is now doing question and answer work about "sitcoms", but is having to work hard to maintain their attention: "Eh?" "Votre permission!", "O.K.", finger on lips, etc. Larry is still chatting and is flicking his book more agitatedly now. He starts to drum with his left hand. Miss Roscow makes two students turn forwards and face the front: "I'd like you to move your chairs forward: your talk is too distracting."

"Tout le monde, ensemble — this is going to get a little boring so we'll do it differently" says the teacher, instructing the non-homework group to gather around her. The students bang their chairs noisily as they move to the

front. Larry talks to his partner, offers humorous remarks on his paper and exchanges things, all as the teacher talks. Many of the class are talking while the teacher talks. "Écoutez, please — we'll get through this quick if we talk together", she says. It is now 1:20. The teacher talks with the class about an interesting upcoming part-time job she is taking. "How much are you getting paid?" — one student calls out. "None of your business", she retorts, although in a friendly way — she then shows them how to write "None of your business" in French. There is more joking between the teacher and class for the next few minutes.

At 1:29, Miss Roscow says "we've been off topic for cinq minutes". Larry has been very quiet during all of this except for quietly joking with his partner. A process of question and answer continues between the teacher and the class about restaurants, food, movies and aqua-parks, though all this is dispensed with good humour. Larry continues to sit quietly, looks at his page and chats to his partner. "Fermez les lévres", she says, as she notices people talking.

At 1:38, Miss Roscow asks the class to put their work away and announces they are moving on to something else. Larry leans back and stretches. There is general chatter in the class. There is more question and answer work with the class, during which Larry talks to the student in front and passes things under the desk to him. The teacher then describes the homework assignment, and at 1:47 dismisses the class, group by group.

Overall in this class, while the teacher's approach is friendly, the class are working rather unimaginatively with homework assignments, worksheets and texts as well as listening to the teacher and engaging in question-and-answer routines with her. For Larry, as for the rest of the class, this is the third class of the day, only one of which (science) has involved students in anything more than listening, copying and making occasional notes. This will be true even in the family studies lesson to follow where, despite the fact that students will be divided into groups to study the meals, customs and tourist attractions of different countries (one per group), they will spend most time working as individuals within the group (one person on food, one on customs etc.), leafing through books for material then

copying it down for their own sub-topic; in a strict and rather mechanical division of labour. This is working individually *within* a group, not collectively *as* a group. By third period, therefore, there is considerable restlessness which is expressed in physical agitation after all this sitting, listening and copying, drumming, chewing, flicking, shuffling, chattering and calling out. In a relatively public format, the teacher is therefore led to allowing some chatter while she talks over it, or to making repeated interventions — finger on lips, movement of disruptive students, demands to "Écoutez" etc. There are no dramatic breakdowns of order, no threats to physical safety, but in this relatively formal, conventional setting, the teacher has to work hard and relentlessly to maintain attention and keep order.

Is Miss Roscow an incompetent, unskilled, unimaginative or simply inexperienced teacher? (she is still in her twenties and has been teaching a little over two years). Had this been the only observation, it would not be difficult to draw such a conclusion of incompetence or inexperience, but these would be inferences made out of context. On a previous day, there had been an opportunity to observe Miss Roscow's teaching for a whole day across several classes. Here she communicated an impression of a very different kind of teacher indeed — so much so, in fact, that during the lesson involving Larry, I recorded "I can't believe this is the same teacher I was with before!"

During this earlier period of observation, I had witnessed Miss Roscow teaching a Grade 11 French class in a way that displayed extensive planning, great imagination and considerable dexterity in creating and managing a learning environment that included a number of different learning centres, each requiring different kinds of active student involvement and engaging different learning styles. All the activities addressed the theme of "Cinema". One group was listening and responding to French songs on an audiocassette. (The teacher supplied a range of genres here including rock, ballads, "new wave", and even comedians). A second was reading real reviews of English movies in French, and writing their own responses in French also. A third group was answering written questions on French movie magazines (copies of "Première" magazine) they had been assigned. A fourth group read published movie reviews on to tape to practice pronunciation, then wrote

brief reviews of their own. A fifth worked on a deceptively simple, but cognitively and socially complex task of matching lists of movie titles in English with titles of the same movies in French. This was often quite difficult because the translations were not literal (for instance, "Beaches" was "Entre Deux Plages" and Jaws was "Les Dents de la Mer") and therefore required dictionary work, scanning for context and considerable cooperative discussion. Half way through the lesson, the groups rotated to their next Learning Centre — full progression through which would take several lessons in all.

There were no visible discipline problems with this class. Miss Roscow did not need to work at keeping order. The students were engaged, indeed engrossed in the activities of learning which seemed relevant to their interests and lives, emotionally enjoyable, socially connected, yet academically demanding. This engaging strategy of teaching and learning, often thought more appropriate only for elementary-age students, interestingly appears to work well here with older students in a subject sometimes thought inappropriate to patterns of learning that are anything less than linear. It impressively explodes the commonly held myth that rigour can only be achieved at the price of relevance. But are these the limits of its application in secondary school? Can more active and enriching teaching strategies only be applied in secondary schools to older, abler, more motivated students, perhaps?

Insight on this issue can be gained from turning to Miss Roscow's next lesson. This was a Grade 9, detracked English class focusing on a theme of myths, fables and legends. With their hats, T-shirts, sweatshirts and running shoes, these students were definitely less blasé and sophisticated than their more neatly attired and generally more poised Grade 11 counterparts. But this class was also exposed to and engaged in cooperative, active, group-based learning. Groups of students constructed their own fables. One group was choosing two creatures from a list (e.g. an eagle and a mouse), selecting a venue (e.g. a graveyard) then cooperatively developing a plot. Another was writing a story for an existing fable — "a wolf in sheep's clothing" — where the students (whom the teacher described as probably destined for "general level" (i.e., lower track) courses in Grade 10) animatedly described to me how

a wolf dresses up as a sheep, invites another sheep for dinner, and announces after they have dined that what it has just eaten is rack of lamb! During all this, Miss Roscow circulated around the class supporting groups and helping with queries — focusing on the task with little need to attend to classroom management. Due to the intensity of the students' engagement, she closed the class by announcing "a lot of you worked really well today" — and they had. This seems to be an exemplary case once more of effective use of active and cooperative learning in a detracked Grade 9 setting — and Miss Roscow certainly came across as a particularly impressive exponent of the method.

How could this be the same teacher whose rather uninspiring detracked French class I described earlier? How could she be such a Jekyll-and-Hyde? The progress of the remainder of her day offers us some clues. Miss Roscow had only twenty-five minutes for lunch, since she had an appointment with a student for whom she was a "mentor" at 12:00. She collected some lunch, found a quiet corner in the staffroom, and developed a test on an overhead transparency for her next class. She would prepare the second half of the text in class, she said, while students were doing the first half. As she walked to the staffroom, she told me that she goes period-period-space-period. By the fourth period, she's *really* tired. If she's "depressed and tired", she added, "she can't run that fast", and her lessons in the last period are therefore not particularly inspiring. And so it was with her period 4, mixed ability Grade 9 French class, with public question-and-answer work around vocabulary where the teacher once more had to work hard to keep order in this setting of public interaction (unlike the cooperative learning, group-based classes where classroom management was scarcely a problem at all). The ensuing test quietened the class down. This certainly created order, but not much inspiration!.

Should Miss Roscow simply work harder to be more consistent with *all* her classes? Is her commitment, consistency and ingenuity at fault? In part, she herself recognizes the need for further improvement when she says that with the Grade 9, her basic style is Socratic, though she recognizes "the kids get bored with this". Yet, I observed success with active methods in Grade 9 English, if not Grade 9 French. It is possible, therefore, that the range of ability in Grade 9 French is simply more of a challenge for her than it is in

Grade 9 English. Because of the ability range and the behavioural problems "I've had to kind of be very traditional for them, very structured", she said.

At the same time, Miss Roscow recalls the immense amount of time she has invested in planning French units and in coming to understand and use the English units: weeks of time, weekends, late nights. "For about two weeks I've been on sort of a high, planning this Grade 11 unit, getting things organized so I know what's coming before the holiday break, what I have to get done, what I need to get planned, and so on," she said.

Pointing to herself and several colleagues, Miss Roscow refers to the immense pressure this puts on oneself and one's personal life "and so... a lot of older teachers are going to have an already fixed family, personal kind of life and who wants to give that up?" Committed, hard working, imaginative and effective as she is in many areas of her teaching, she nonetheless feels that "I don't think everyone should have to do this much work!"

Teachers don't just have jobs. They have lives as well; lives with interests that need enriching and obligations that need fulfilling. One cannot properly analyze, still less idolize "good teaching" without attending to these realistic contingencies. This is one of the inescapable realities of restructuring; one that affects the capacity of restructuring to be sustained by teachers over time and across many settings.

What this second case reveals is that much of what teachers do and how effective they are is not merely a matter of skill, knowledge or training in particular methods or techniques (though these things are important), but also of *context*. Some classes are perceived as more difficult and demanding than others (and Grade 9 detracked French is certainly one of those). Some classes occur at the wrong end of the day when effort is expended and structures therefore tend to become more rigid, discipline more demanding and classroom management a little more casual. And while this teacher and setting clearly illustrate the exciting possibilities for creating new paradigms of secondary school teaching, the demanding nature of planning, preparation and innovation even among extremely capable teachers who are highly committed, raises questions about how long teachers can sustain this level of commitment, whether many other teachers could do so (especially those in

later career); whether ethically it is appropriate to ask for these levels of commitment from most secondary school teachers; or whether the extra energy required is a short-term surge that is necessary for creating (but not so much for sustaining) new paradigms of teaching and learning. (Miss Roscow herself stated that after two years, she was now just able to begin improvising cooperative learning without laborious prior planning, in the way that many other teachers would already improvise methods of a more conventional kind.)

Contexts clearly matter for teachers' work. On the basis of research in sixteen secondary schools, McLaughlin and Talbert (1993:17) delineated several contexts of teaching that are embedded within one another in a pattern of increasing inclusiveness. Thus, the teacher's classroom is embedded within the subject area or department, which is embedded within the school organization, which is embedded in turn within the school system, then the parental community and social class culture, the higher education context of admission standards and student achievement, the context of professional associations and networks, and the broad environmental context of policy initiatives, educational goals, existing norms of practice and so forth.

These interpretations of context help us understand what factors are at work in shaping patterns of teaching and teacher development. They link the actions and self of the teacher to the opportunities and constraints of the surrounding situation (Woods, 1977; Becker, 1952; Nias, 1989). Thus, even in the case of this one teacher's day, we have seen how her actions, experiences and the ways she articulates them are deeply embedded in a number of intersecting contexts — the time of the day; the demands of different subjects, age groups and ability mixes; the basic lesson, subject and scheduling structures of secondary school and the fact that, in Miss Roscow's terms, you're "always on" as a result; the liberations or limitations of age, health and energy; and so on.

The data described here clearly indicate that it is possible for teachers like Miss Roscow to meet the demands of detracked classes effectively. Even for the same teacher, learning can be more effective, and discipline less demanding, if the teaching and learning engage students in cooperative tasks

that are relevant, imaginative and challenging. Many teachers would feel proud to be able to emulate what Miss Roscow has modelled. But this kind of teaching is demonstrably difficult. It takes time, planning and preparation: lots of it. If teachers are "always on", one reality of restructuring is that quality will almost certainly sag at particular points in the day. Teachers are only human, and their finite resources of health and energy will realistically and inevitably lead to troughs as well as peaks in their levels of performance on a fairly regular basis.

Is this an inevitable price of active teaching and learning? Or are there more effective ways where teachers can support each other in team contexts so that some can be "on" and some less fully engaged, at any one point? In addition, how long can teachers work at this pitch? Is active teaching and learning a perpetual and unsustainable demand — or do the pressures ease up once the initial stages of implementation have been passed? And can all teachers be as energetic and indefatigable as the younger teacher described here? What are the realities of restructuring for other teachers in other contexts and at other career stages, and what patterns of support for and modifications to implementation can be devised for and with them?

The realities of restructuring are often very different from the rhetoric. Actions and behaviours are often quite different from plans and designs. And the realities often differ depending on your standpoint in the classroom or the school. Students' realities are different from teachers' realities, and teachers' realities often different again from those of their administrators.

What these data reveal in the case of a teacher particularly committed to dramatic change and often skilled at implementing it, is that teachers' voices and experiences are embedded in and can only be properly understood in relation to the changing contexts of their work and their wider working lives. The voices and realities of teaching vary even for individual teachers depending on the context and the occasion. The same teacher can produce levels of different extremes of quality on the very same day. What seem like generic questions of commitment and competence, therefore, are on closer inspection, more often a matter of context and contingency.

3. Contexts of Change

The contexts of teaching shape not only what teachers can do, but also the knowledge and experience which guide their teaching. How practical or professionally appropriate such knowledge and experience is, can therefore only be determined in relation to the kinds of contexts which have shaped it and sustain it, rather than in relation to purportedly generic qualities of teachers' knowledge as a whole.

This can be seen in my third portrayal where teachers in a suburban high school interpreted the meaning and implications of a legislated mandate to detrack Grade 9 by September of 1993. This case is drawn from a wider study of how teachers in eight secondary schools of varying size, structure and culture, responded to the mandated requirement to detrack (Hargreaves et al., 1992). In the suburban high school I studied, the principal was wrestling personally and intensely with the issue of detracking and whether it was desirable or practical. He felt it important to develop a clear view of this himself before he could engage with his staff about it in discussion, or use it as a basis for planning inservice training. He wished to protect his staff from possible harm should detracking prove unworkable and undesirable. But one of the consequences of this wait-and-see policy was that at the time of the project interviews, there had been few opportunities for teachers to discuss, still less to see, examples of detracking themselves.

In the absence of discussions about detracking that might have established common meanings, and in the absence of access to or experience of concrete examples of detracking, teachers fell back on their own practical experiences, however distant or fragmentary, to construct meanings for it. For those already teaching *de facto* detracked classes — namely the family studies and technical education teachers — this was relatively easy. As the technical education teacher put it, "I'm doing it already; my classes are detracked. They have been for years." The limited number of students enrolled in technical education courses meant that the different levels had to be taught together. Similarly, the family studies teacher did not think that detracking was "going to present any kind of a problem" in her subject,

because "we're already exposed to so many different levels of kids in the same classroom.... It's already been happening in our classrooms."

Other teachers, however, had to search for more remote, analogous experiences to construct a meaning for detracking. A teacher who had taught in elementary school many years ago, for instance, said that "having taught elementary school for eleven years, I'm not particularly worried about (detracking). I've done this before." Another teacher close to retirement searched back to his very first year of teaching to infuse detracking with some sense of practical familiarity. For him, detracking was "just like the old one room school" where he had taught for a year in early career. More generally, when asked to imagine what detracking would look like, many imagined it would consist of a type of streaming within the class — the class being divided into three or four different groups who would be taught differently or at a different pace. Here, teachers appeared to be drawing on their existing understanding of basic, general, advanced and possibly enriched tracks and simply reinscribing them in an imaginary detracked setting.

These attempts to scan the career and the context for practical meanings that might allay anxieties about ill-defined and perplexing changes are understandable. But they are also dangerous. For while older elementary school classes and one-room schoolhouses might have some superficial parallels with current conceptions of detracking, there are also some profound differences — for instance with regard to developments in our understanding of teaching strategies, new forms of student assessment, approaches to individualized programming, the nature of student learning styles and so forth.

Of course, innovations do need to be grounded in practical experience and interaction if they are to have meaning and purpose for teachers. Teachers give meaning to change by grounding it in their own personal, practical knowledge and experience. However, where schools are unable or unwilling to construct recent and relevant experiences for teachers that are closely connected to the focus of the change, teachers are forced to draw deeply on reserves of personal and practical knowledge and experience that are vaguely analogous to the change at hand, but may be ultimately anachronistic

in relation to it. In this respect, over-reliance on past analogous experiences can create meanings and understandings that distort the purpose and perception of the innovation. Making detracking meaningful by likening it to elementary classrooms of fifteen years ago, or to one-room schoolhouses long before that, is to rely on personal practical knowledge that is limiting rather than liberating in its effects. Under these conditions, teachers' personal, practical knowledge can from the standpoint of the change, actually become highly particular, parochial and *impractical* knowledge (Hargreaves, 1994).

What teachers have to say about detracking or any other change depends in part on what concrete knowledge and experience they have of it. The contexts and careers of teachers work frame this knowledge and experience in particular ways that can make it broad or narrow, rich or impoverished. In this sense the value of teachers' voices as appraisers of change, depends in part on the contexts where these teachers have worked and the knowledge that has accrued from teaching in those contexts.

Conclusions

This paper has presented a collage of realities of restructuring which, I believe, have implications for reviewing and redirecting some of our approaches to understanding the experience, knowledge and voices of teachers. These implications are:

- there is no singular, generic teacher's voice; there are only multiple teacher voices.
- claims about *the teacher's voice* have usually conflated moral ideals and prescriptions with empirical realities and descriptions, often clothing the first in mantles of the second.
- claims about teachers' personal knowledge and the teacher's voice have often been based on selectively appropriated empirical cases that accord with researchers' own inclinations and interests, rather than a diversity of ordinary and even disagreeable cases which might also challenge them.

- teachers' voices have often been unduly silent in some contexts (policy and research), but overly strident in others (classrooms and schools). It is a peculiarly academic conceit to imagine that the most salient silences are those in the discourse of scholarship and research. It is the voices and silences in classroom discourse that are much more immediately important for students and teachers.

- teachers' voices and experiences are lodged in particular slices of school reality. They are necessarily partial (in both senses of the term). The voices and experiences of students and parents are, of course, also selective and partial. Where there is no dialogue, or development of shared purpose, the voices and experiences of these different groups are likely to remain dissonant and dissipated in nature — elements of an autistic classroom and community culture of poor communication and misunderstanding

- teachers' voices should be accorded no special *a priori* privilege or superiority in relation to other voices in the educational community although such privileges could and perhaps should certainly be earned over time. Teachers' voices should be heard and articulated alongside and in dialogue with those other voices.

- teachers' voices like all other voices, are often valid but can sometimes be vapid. They can only be properly understood and evaluated in the context of their development and use.

- some contexts create knowledge and experience that is liberating. Other contexts create knowledge and experience that is limiting. In contexts that restrict professional learning, personal practical knowledge can become personal but also profoundly impractical knowledge.

- it is time to contextualize the study of teachers' voices, knowledge and experience more, and to romanticize and moralize about them less. It is time to address the silences that many teachers voices create, as well as the ones that they must endure.

The important thing is not merely to *present* teachers' voices, but to *re-present* them critically and contextually. From the standpoint of the researcher, Britzman (1991:13) has argued that "to assume a critical voice... does not mean to destroy or devalue the struggles of others... (but)... a critical voice is concerned not just with representing the voices of oneself and others, but with narrating, considering and evaluating them". From the standpoint of teachers, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991:104) advise that

> teachers need to make spaces in their classrooms so that their own voices, along with those of their students, can be heard as part of a wider dialogue and critical encounter with the knowledge forms and social relations that structure the classroom and articulate with forms of social and political authority at work in the dominant society.

The teacher's voice has been made into a romantic singularity claiming recognition and celebration. We have seen, however, that there are many teachers' voices, not just one. And there are other voices worth articulating and hearing as well as those of teachers. In the present context of restructuring, the time seems to have come to bring together the different voices surrounding schooling — students with teachers; teachers with parents — and risk cacophony in our struggle to build authentic community. It is time to deconstruct the teacher's voice so we can reposition or represent it alongside its other worthy counterparts.

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Notes

1. Two particular studies from that program are drawn upon here. The first, *Secondary School Work Cultures and Educational Change* (Hargreaves et al., 1992) is a study of eight varied secondary schools and how the work cultures and structures of the schools affected how the teachers and principals interpreted and responded to an upcoming, legislated mandate to detrack Grade 9. The principal investigators for the study were A. Hargreaves, J. Davis, and M. Fullan. A. Hargreaves was the project coordinator.

   The second study, *Years of Transition: Times for Change* (Hargreaves et al., 1993) is an analysis of issues in Grade 7-9 as they arose in over 60 pilot projects funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education to develop innovative programs and services in these intermediate or transition years. The principal investigators for this study were A. Hargreaves, K. Leithwood, D. Gérin-Lajoie, D. Thiessen, and B. Cousins. A. Hargreaves was the project coordinator.

2. The restructuring efforts include a legislated mandate to detrack Grade 9 from September 1993, and to institute a common curriculum based on learning outcomes for Grades 7, 8 and 9. In addition, through the impetus of over 60 funded pilot projects, and given the disruption caused by reforms in tracking and curriculum practices, schools have been encouraged to devleop alternative assessment practices, innovative structures of timetabling and student organization, forms of curriculum integration, initiatives in guidance and counselling, stronger community links, and supportive systems of teacher inservice education.